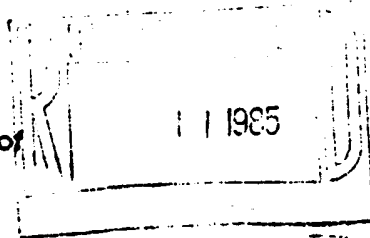




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FAA REPORTS MORE THAN 1,000 FLIGHT ASSISTS IN 1984

In April 1984, a Federal Aviation Administration air traffic controller in St. Louis gave flying instructions by radio to a woman in a private aircraft when her pilot-husband suffered a heart attack. The controller guided her down to a safe landing.

A few months later, Miami controllers, confronted with the same scenario, provided similar assistance and went home that night knowing they had saved a human life. And in November, Kansas City controllers helped two passengers keep their airplane straight and level until the ill pilot recovered consciousness and brought them all down safely.

The FAA calls these incidents flight assists, and during 1984 controllers and flight service station specialists were involved in 1,069 assists, possibly saving the lives of 2,852 people.

Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Hanford Dole said, "I am very proud of the highly professional work done by the air traffic control specialists who have guided so many pilots in distress to safe landings. They bring credit to the entire air traffic control service."

FAA Administrator Donald D. Engen said that these flight assists happened at a rate of roughly three a day in 1984, and that almost all of them involved private and business aircraft.

More typically, the assistance given to pilots in trouble involves less dramatic situations, although most assists are still critical. Typically, a non-instrument rated pilot is lost, caught on top of clouds and may be running low on fuel. Controllers and flight service station specialists use radar or direction-finding equipment to pinpoint the pilot's position, talk him down through the overcast, and guide him to the closest airport for a safe landing.

The FAA Administrator said, "These flight assists rarely make the newspapers or evening television news, so the outstanding work done by the agency's air traffic control specialists on a day-to-day basis goes largely unnoticed by the general public.

"However," he added, "I believe the aviation community understands and appreciates these efforts, and pilots fly with a lot more assurance knowing that help from the FAA is as close as their radio microphone if they should get in trouble. Both the pilots and controllers know that the FAA is here to serve."

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